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4547-78

16 October 1978

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Bowie

SUBJECT: ESTIMATES--Preliminary Sketches on
Shape, Substance, and Style

I.

1. This memorandum responds to your request for my thoughts on the shape of estimates.

2. Its observations necessarily reflect an experience which is long on consumer reactions, reminiscent on production and coordination, and short on NFAC process. It opens with a few reflections on the nature of the product, looks backward to the characteristics of estimates that have seemed to me useful or memorable; attempts to project these against future needs. It is addressed, in the main, to major political estimates, but some of its comments may have wider compass.

II.

3. The dominant characteristic of political estimates is that they live and die -- attract or lose an influential audience -- in a competitive world. They differ from such traditional intelligence subjects as warning and weaponry, deployments and subversion. There, the Agency's unique resources and analytical skills guarantee attention. They are unlike the more specialized studies of economics, science, and

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technology. There, user dependence is a more stable condition, and the Agency's traditions of service and reputation for disciplined, responsive analysis assure a substantial readership.

4. Political estimates have unusual environmental hazards:

There are occasional policy officers who do not know they need help. There is perhaps a plurality of them convinced that intelligence analysis in the political field is, if not one of the do-it yourself trades, best done under proprietary circumstances. There are the erosions of overnight cables and the latest private conversations.

5. Decisions move around them without visible pause -- when they are indifferently or too conventionally done; when they lack unique intelligence materials; offer stale perspectives, worn approaches, or one-dimensional analyses; are excessively hedged, insufficiently venturesome, unintentionally imprecise. The senior consumer has access to enough of such materials.

6. There is a case for regarding the NIEs in their political estimate mode, as now conceived, as an endangered, if not an extinct, species. The case seems to me unlikely to prosper, for the reason that the needs they are meant to serve will not diminish. With all their limitations we have nothing to put in their place for proper judgment of the interplay of present forces and trends -- for effective understanding of the accelerations of change and the shifting balances of power and wealth within and among nations -- for identification of new

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dimensions of threat and interdependence. For an increasingly complex world, they will remain indispensable -- when they are well done; when they try to see "problems in the round"; find the linkages among diplomacy, strategy, resources, technology; dissect the quality and nature of foreign societies in terms of implications for United States policy -- when they perform these tasks (as have some recent NFAC products) they will not lack readers or bite.

7. Gaps between performance and potential obviously remain. These concern significant readerships and decision relevance. They involve the shape of papers, the workings of the production and coordination process, and the selection and development of analysts. It is by no means clear that the first of these is the variable that matters most. But shape constitutes the visible output, and its requirements may influence or move the process and people inputs.

III.

8. A look backward, based on personal crotchets, some recollection of memorable estimates, and user syndromes suggests that the shape of the estimate was effective:

-- When it was readable. This was something more than literary quality: it was impact, clarity in its claim upon the reader's attention, swiftness of exposition, quick involvement in the issues, judgments and methodology. Lacking these qualities, the estimate went unread or was consigned elsewhere for summary by third or fourth hands.

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-- When it had sound intelligence values. These may have derived from inclusion of unique materials, from unequivocating responsiveness to policy-maker questions, from the construction of frameworks for interpreting intelligence about known or unknown quantities. Without these, the estimates became essays -- scholarly, informative perhaps -- but indistinguishable from a general run of departmental materials.

-- When it contained a body of analysis which was uncommon, distinctive, exceptional. This may have been a matter of subject or issues that cut across the seam lines of departments or their bureaus. It may have been analytical horizons which went farther out than operational time frames. Or, more often than not it was analytical quality, and, in particular, a multidisciplinary approach, which, no other Agency seemed qualified or able to undertake.

IV.

9. I would guess that readability, sound intelligence values, uncommon and distinctive analysis -- whatever the variety of design -- should drive the shape of estimates to come. The basic model that I think emerges from these considerations is a much briefer, more sharply focussed estimate, tailored severely to decision-maker requirements. Its body would consist solely of an integrated, multidisciplinary analysis. (See para. 12). All uni-disciplinary sections or studies -- all individual

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agency submissions (including what is now designated as "internal political" or "foreign policy") -- would be published, if at all, in annexes or as a separate volume. My preference would be for the latter; I am advised that the cost of a separately stapled, detachable annex paper would not be significantly more. The new formats being developed by PPG would admirably lend themselves to this style. Some suggestions follow for possible experimentation in the direction I think the process should go.

10. On Readability

a. Bulk. As an habitual user and an observer of users, I acknowledge addiction to the view that the impact of a paper varies inversely with its size. All papers should, of course, be tightly written. The question really concerns what a given paper should seek to include. I am inclined to believe that shorter, more succinct estimates, sharply centered on specific analytical problems, have greater impact. I suspect that those papers which try to combine too much, say a country estimate with stability forecasts or transient or long-term operational issues, no longer present a form of analysis attractive to senior level readers. They either say too much about a country -- and become coastline tours -- or, too little -- and are ritualistic and incomplete. Their treatment of issues or forecasts is necessarily spliced against a country backdrop, but seldom derives from, or is integrally related to, a generalized account of the country's situation and prospects. I would think it worth-

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while to separate out the country and the issues papers.

(See para. 10)

b. Summaries. Whatever its form, the précis is critical. It turns users on or off; may settle the fate of an estimate in the initial seconds of reading time. My preference would be for an Executive Summary -- never longer than a single page -- to open an estimate. It seems to me a vehicle more likely to give a sense of the whole than do the Key Judgments. The latter could be isolated in the text in bold face type or highlighted in margins, devices which might better stimulate selective reading of the accompanying analysis. But this would be a personal choice, and it puts a rigorous premium on summary style.

11. On Sound Intelligence Values

In the main, these concern substance more than shape. For political estimates or analyses in some depth, values will reside in how well decision-relevant facts are sorted out, the forces and trends at work and alternative interplays evaluated, their implications judged, and the consequences of various outcomes estimated. The suggestion was made above for separating country estimates from issues and forecast analyses. A brief illustrative section follows:

a. Country Estimates. There are a number of countries of steadily increasing significance to U.S. policy -- many of them "the rising middles" -- which are generally unfamiliar and not well understood. A series of new estimates could take these on with a central analytical focus: how their society and system

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work. The body of the estimate should deal with those forces and trends which will likely be the determinants of continuity or change and how our policy might affect them. Its approach should seek to explain what is driving events -- the causal forces, the constants, variables, and critical points -- where the crossroads are and what alternative lines of development lead from them. It should concern itself with changes in social stratification and how these will impinge on power relationships, policy, and viability. It should give greater emphasis to such non-conventional inquiries as the subject country's perceptions of the United States, its national goals, its vision of its role in the world, its political, moral, and psychological compulsions. The aim of such papers should be to give the policy-maker a sense of the leadership styles involved and the probable responses to varying forms of outside inducement or pressure -- of how the place works and how its leaders think it works. He can find such materials nowhere else, and no other agency today, I think, is capable of producing them.

b. Annexes. In this format, separate annexes would cover the conventional political, economic, military sections. But these should be situated more broadly in cultural and sociological background. As an example, a military section might be more useful to a policy-maker if it also included some discussion of prevailing

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defense concepts and doctrine, some account of military traditions (is it a parade army or a fighting force or a domestic political guarantor?) some discussion of military sociology (is there an officer class -- how selected, promoted -- a conscript or a volunteer force -- a politically active or quiescent reserve?). Similar approaches are possible in political and economic analyses.

12. On Uncommon and Distinctive Analysis

It is here that greatest return can be expected. Three suggestions:

a. Concept Paper. The first step in estimate production -- before Terms of Reference are drafted -- should invariably be a concept paper, agreed by all participants, crisply setting out the estimate purpose. The concept paper need be no longer than a paragraph. The essential is that there be, at the beginning, absolute clarity between tasking authority and production analysts -- and among participating analysts -- on the estimates' aim. As matters now stand, the concept of the paper is probably implicit, or inchoate, in the minds of the Terms of Reference drafters. I see few disadvantages and much benefit in making it explicit and agreed at the start of the process. Unless there is shared clarity at the beginning of an estimate on what the paper is intended to do, it is off to shaky start and the wobbling will predictably grow.

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Such concept papers might collaterally include -- for effect on the NITs process -- direct linkage to underlying NITs questions, and might -- to stimulate user-producer communion -- be tabled separately at some early estimate scheduling point at NFIB or other interagency meetings.

b. Terms of Reference. These should be, in every case, derivative from the concept paper, and should not be undertaken -- still less distributed as drafting responsibilities -- until the concept has been agreed. The Terms should have a forward cast and be issue-oriented. Their main purposes should be to pose the key questions and the main themes deriving from the concept and to indicate the special factors and probable contingencies with which the analysis presumptively must deal.

c. Multidisciplinary Analysis. The body of the political estimate should be an exclusively multidisciplinary structure. This should apply -- I think, virtually without exception -- to all political estimates and should become the hall^{way}work of Agency production. "Multidisciplinary" in this sense, is to be distinguished from "interdisciplinary". I take "interdisciplinary" to mean the use of different disciplines to illuminate different aspects of a common subject -- political, economic, military, etc. -- and "multidisciplinary" to mean the use of various disciplines in an integrated analytic approach to the whole subject. In this sense, "cross-disciplinary" is a synonym for the latter but not the former. "Interdisciplinary" involves splicing

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separate sections together with narrative, connective flow, literary stitching, "Multidisciplinary" is woven full width: an integrated analysis which is, or can become, a unique value of NFAC process and product.

With the estimate itself consisting of a single integrated, multidisciplinary analysis, and all interdisciplinary material, if required, in separate annexes, estimate bulk can be much reduced. More importantly, the critical judgments will be highlighted, and possibly remembered.

// Multidisciplinary analytical skills, as posited here, are notably rare and require awareness of complexity, intellectual training, and a conceptual approach most analysts miss. It can seldom be performed well by working groups or committees. They may be useful in a cross-critique role. But as producers they have incurable propensities to add, to compromise, to suture. What is needed is a corps of senior analysts with multidisciplinary competence -- real and not superficial generalists -- who can, as individuals take on the major estimates. (Many estimates of importance do not, of course, require cross-disciplinary analysis. Specific developments in economics, weaponry, science technology come to mind. But even for these specialized and technical fields, if the estimate is pressed on to consequence and implication, adequate analysis becomes multidisciplinary.) To develop the requisite numbers of multidisciplinary analysts -- I think this

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must be a largely in-house project -- NFAC has the advantage of being able to build on rotational training experience and the effective multidisciplinary modes it already has in place.

A final point: Externally, in the area of coordination it might be -- I have less confidence in this point -- that a focus on an integrated, multidisciplinary estimate, rather than on the private turfs of the separate sections, might stimulate attendance at inter-agency coordination meetings by a somewhat more senior, more analytical group of other agency representatives.

V.

13. I should be very pleased to discuss any of the foregoing -- its parts or its general directions -- with you.


William Leonhart

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